

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street, Phoenix AZ 85012
Thursday – June 11, 2009

M I N U T E S

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 10:00a.m. by Vice Chairman Fulkerson.

Present:

Advisory Commissioners

Linda Fulkerson, Vice Chairman
Thomas Heaney
Phillip Quochytewa Sr.
Larry McKim
Bill Lunsford
George Cushing

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Plans
Lee Borgen, Veterans' Benefits Counselor

Absent:

Ken Yamanouchi, Chairman
Gary Fredricks
Terrie Gent

Guests:

Sandra Flint, Director, VA Regional Office
Phoenix
Monica Cabrera, Public Information Officer,
VA Regional Office Phoenix
Geno Talas, Director, Hopi Veterans' Services
E.R. Wheeler, Navajo Nation Council
Leo Chillischilly, Veteran, Navajo Nation
David Shondee, Navajo Nation Council
Delegate
Tom Gorman, Veterans' Service Officer, Navajo
Nation, Chinle Agency
Diana Talas
Ancita Chillischilly
Marlene Shondee
Barbara Quochytewa

Opening – Vice Chairman Fulkerson opened the meeting at 10:00a.m. with appropriate ceremony, welcomed the guests and invited the Commissioners to introduce themselves with a brief bio.

Minutes – The minutes of May 14, 2009 were approved as distributed. Moved by Commissioner McKim and seconded by Commissioner Cushing.

Communications – Chairman Yamanouchi letter to Governor Jan Brewer dated May 26, 2009

Agency Announcements – David Hampton:

1. Director Strickland is at the VFW Department of Arizona Convention.
2. The Military Family Relief Fund bill (SB-1176) and Enduring Freedom Memorial bill (SB-1020), both assigned to the Senate Veterans and Military Affairs and Rules Committees, were given do pass recommendation by Senate Veterans and Military Affairs Committee by unanimous vote.
3. Arizona Medal of Honor bill (SB-1429) assigned to the Senate Veterans and Military Affairs and Rules Committees was given do pass recommendation and amended by Senate Veterans and Military Affairs Committee on unanimous vote. The amendment changed the name to the Arizona Gold Star Military Medal.

4. Governor Brewer has indicated that she will not sign any bill until the budget is signed.
5. The Arizona Department of Administration is making plans to shut down State government at midnight on June 30, 2009 if the budget is not signed. The State Veteran Home will not be affected by a shut down.
6. The 10 million for the Tucson veterans' home looks good.

Region 1 meeting in Chandler AZ – Commissioner Cushing reported that everything is on track for the September 26, 2009 meeting at American Legion Post 35 on Chandler Blvd. This region meeting is taking place in conjunction with Chandler's annual Veterans' Expo. Combining the Commission Region meeting with another community event has been a recommendation to enhance community participation. This will be a good test for the viability of this new venue for region meetings across the state.

Review of follow up actions:

1. Commissioner McKim noted that the question of being able to use a credit card for donations to the Arizona Veterans' Donation Fund has yet to be resolved. Gabe Forsberg advised the use of credit cards for donations is a complex issue and is outside the scope of this Agency's authority. It has to go through the General Accounting Office. She will follow up and advise the Commission accordingly.
2. Commissioner Heaney gave a comprehensive report on the process that led to the very productive region meeting in Chinle AZ. He summarized with three basic recommendations:
 - (1) Meetings should be held at a veteran neutral location rather than at a veteran organization's home facility.
 - (2) Planning needs to start at least six months out with the time and physical location established.
 - (3) Initial notification "Save the Date" needs to be made to all interested parties as early as possible (particularly Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Director's office, VA Regional Office, resident VA Medical Center and local and state government officials).

Sandra Flint advised that the snow storm in Flagstaff prevented her representative from getting to Chinle and noted that having a twelve month meeting schedule with at least basic geographic locations for region meetings would be very helpful for scheduling purposes.

Open discussion:

1. Vice Chairman Fulkerson and David Hampton presented Commissioners Quochoytewa and Heaney each with a Certificate of Appreciation from Governor Brewer for their hard work and dedication to the Arizona Veterans' community through participation on the Arizona Veterans' Service Advisory Commission. This was their last meeting because their terms as a Commissioner will expire June 30, 2009.
2. Commissioner McKim, in his capacity as President of the Southern Arizona Cemetery Memorial Foundation thanked the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services for their support in reaching out to local and national media for the re-interment of the civil war soldiers' remains at the Southern Arizona Veteran Cemetery on May 16, 2009. the re-burial is in an area designed to authentically replicate a civil war era cemetery. He has received favorable comments from all over the country for this one of its kind event. It took two years in planning with thousands of hours from hundreds of dedicated volunteers to make it happen. It was truly a community project. On behalf of the Foundation, President McKim expressed his deep appreciation to everyone involved for their steadfast support and dedication to this unique opportunity to honor veterans of a bygone era in American history.

3. Commissioner Quochytewa recognized all the guests from the Native American community, thanking them for their interest and dedication to the Native American veteran community. He invited Geno Talas to address the Commissioners. Mr. Talas thanked Commissioner Quochytewa for his work on behalf Native American veterans and offered the following comments:
 - (1) Thanked the Commissioners for visiting Chinle.
 - (2) Thanked Director Strickland for his visit to the Hopi Tribal Council and subsequent donation of funds for the 2009 Run for the Wall and Hopi veterans' Services Transportation needs.
 - (4) The Office of Hopi Veterans' Services provides services to approximately 2,000 veterans and family members and over 60 active duty personnel. They are feeling the budget crunch like everyone else. Their prioritized wish list includes:
 - a. Establishment of "one stop" Veterans' Center.
 - b. Get an off-road vehicle, adapted to safely carry wheelchairs, to transport veterans' to and from medical appointments.
 - c. Establish an accredited veterans' service office on Hopi land. Due to the topography and transportation difficulties Chinle is too far away for most Hopi veterans to travel.
 - d. Obtain a "Taps" horn for military burial honors.
 - e. Continue getting veterans to register with VA to get the numbers to justify a VA Clinic on Hopi land.
 - f. Enhance the Hopi Veterans' Legacy Projects:
 - (a) Upgrade the current "Wall of Honor" and flagpole and add names.
 - (b) Hopi Code Talkers' Monument; dedication in November 2009.
 - (c) Work on Federal legislation for a Gold Medal for Code Talkers;he announced that they did receive a grant to fund Hopi women veterans' attendance at the upcoming Arizona Military Women's Conference 2009.

Public comments:

1. E.R. Wheeler:
 - (1) Thanked Commissioners Quochytewa and Heaney for their support of Navajo Nation Veterans.
 - (2) Invited the Commissioners to return to Navajo during the Navajo Fair.
 - (3) Requested an accredited Veterans' Benefits Counselor in Ft Defiance and Tuba City to serve Navajo veterans.
 - (4) Solicited support for the following:
 - a. Cleanup and repairs at the veterans' cemetery in Ft Defiance.
 - b. Getting a VA Clinic on Navajo or at least setup a sharing agreement with Indian Health Service for veterans around Window Rock and Page.
 - c. Getting a veterans nursing home on Navajo land.
 - (5) Expressed deep appreciation for Director Strickland's interest and support of the 10,000 veterans on Navajo plus 2,000 on Hopi.
 - (6) Thanked the Commissioners for their interest and support of veterans.
2. Earl Milford, CDR VFW Post 6789
 - (1) He met with the Commissioners and Director Strickland concerning the veterans' cemetery in Ft Defiance. There are over 600 veterans buried there and they need financial assistance to upgrade and better maintain the cemetery. They are doing the best they can but Navajo finding is extremely limited.
 - (2) Veterans on the Ft Defiance side of the reservation are in need of transportation to the VA Medical Center Phoenix. There is an excellent Indian Health Services hospital in Ft Defiance. Why can't there be a sharing agreement with the VA so that veteran's can be treated there instead of having to travel to Phoenix?

(3) Most veterans on the Navajo Nation are unemployed. The employment rate overall is 50%.

(5) One small complaint: The Veterans' Benefits Counselor that comes to Navajo is extremely hard of hearing. Having to shout to be understood deprives veterans of privacy concerning their individual issues that need to be discussed with the counselor. Gabe Forsberg advised that she will pass that information to the Veterans' Services Division for action.

Comments for the good of the Commission:

1. Commissioner Quochoyewa:

(1) Thanked the guests for their support of him during his tenure as Commissioner on the Arizona Veterans' Service Advisory Commission and noted that his work with veterans' issues will continue. He also thanked the Agency staff and his fellow Commissioners for their support over the years.

(2) Thanked Sandra Flint for attending this meeting. He reinforced the importance of having a Regional Office representative at the region meetings since the majority of issues raised concern VA benefits obtained through the Regional Office and access to medical care.

2. Commissioner Heaney:

(1) Announced that has not requested reappointment for a second term.

(2) Thanked the Commissioners for their support during his tour as a Commissioner.

(3) Thanked the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services staff for their support of the Commissioners' duties and in particular expressed appreciation for Gabe Forsberg's steadfast dedication to consistently going the extra mile to be of assistance to the Advisory Commission.

Adjournment – Vice Chairman Fulkerson adjourned the meeting at 11:15a.m. (Moved by Commissioner McKim and seconded by Commissioner Cushing.) The next meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on July 9, 2009 at the Arizona State Veteran Home, 4141 North Third Street, Phoenix Arizona.

Respectfully submitted,

S. Lee Borgen
Secretary